

CULTURAL SENSITIVITY TOWARDS INTANGIBLE VALUES IN MONUMENTS AND SITES — A COMPARISON BETWEEN EASTERN ASIAN AND WESTERN COUNTRIES

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Introduction

Since the adoption of the *UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* on October 17 2003, the concept of “intangible cultural heritage” has become one of the main concerns among the cultural heritage realm. According to the Article 2 of the convention, the term “intangible cultural heritage” means the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skill – as well as the instruments, objects, artifacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage. Besides intangible cultural heritage, intangible values embedded in the deep layers of the monuments and sites also started to be explored and discussed. In other words, the safeguarding the intangible cultural heritage and the preservation of the intangible values in monuments and sites has become a trend. However, due to the cultural sensitivity, different attitudes towards intangible cultural values in monuments and sites between Western and Eastern Asian countries exist which affect the preservation and conservation practice. This Paper, based on the premise that tangible and intangible values in monuments and sites are of equally importance, will discuss the rising cultural sensitivity towards intangible values in Eastern Asian countries.

Tangible Phenomenon in Conservation

Etymologically speaking, historicity means historical actuality and the importance of history as a standard of value. In the conservation of monuments and sites, historicity may imply the retention of historical characteristics that is the tangible parts of the cultural heritage. This implication can easily be misunderstood and misinterpreted by those who in favor of a frozen appearance of the past commonly seen in the post-war Western countries. There is no doubt that the

distinguishing original characteristics of the monuments and sites shall be preserved as much as possible if there is any intervention. However, this does not mean that preservation and restoration of tangible parts of the monuments and sites should become the only goal to achieve. In the past few decades, monuments such as classic temples, mediaeval cathedrals and monasteries, renaissance villas and churches, baroque palaces as well as archaeological sites were the main subjects of the preservation in the West.

Following the guidelines of conservation, especially the doctrine of the authenticity, Western countries have demonstrated their abilities and ambitions to represent the human past through the preservation and conservation of the cultural heritage. The fact that the majority of the cases inscribed on the World Heritage list before the end of 1980s belong to the monuments and sites of the Western countries is a concrete proof. In many cases, historic built form of the past became the main concern whenever the conservation is needed. In the Eastern Asian countries, situation is even worse. Improper preservation and conservation happened again and again. In contrast to Western countries, which follow the concepts and values existing in many international documents, East Asian countries tend to set up their own values. For example, the ideas of ‘ruins’, ‘fragmental heritage’ or ‘partially lost’ are not accepted by many people in East Asian countries. On the contrary, they tend to think the ‘completeness’ of the cultural heritage, especially its appearance, is an absolute must and the most important matter in conservation.

Under such circumstance, ruins such as the Colosseum in Rome, the Acropolis in Athens or the Fountain Abbey in England are not satisfactory results for the people in East Asian countries. Consequently, restoration of all missing parts to their original appearance, relocation of the monuments and reconstruction of buildings longer exist

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become the most common intervention in these countries.¹ Consequently, several problems arise in restoration, relocation and reconstruction process. The most debated one is the lacking of 'authenticity' in these interventions. Without the respects to the historical evidences, the restorers become the destroyers to the heritage. The key to this phenomenon is due to the 'conjectural attitude' of the professionals and craftsmen.²

Conjectural attitude is absolutely prohibited in the process of conservation intervention in Western countries. However, conjectural intervention happens frequently in East Asian countries. For example, the mistakes have been reoccurring in Taiwan's cultural heritage restorations. The result of these "growing from nowhere" processes are often only to satisfy the visualization and psychological demands of a certain historicist professionals, and does not help to either the historicity or the authenticity of heritage. By pointing out this phenomenon in the conservation of the intangible cultural heritage, I don't mean that the intangible cultural heritage does not exist. Before the mid-1990s, the intangible cultural heritage was treated independently. Intangible values in the monuments and sites in most Eastern countries was rarely an issue in their conservation.

Rising Appreciation of Intangible Cultural Heritage

Since human touches of these conserved monuments and sites are missing, result with such emphasis on the visible parts of the cultural heritage has been reviewed and criticized. At the end of the twentieth century, the issue of non-visible parts of the cultural heritage started to be paid attention to.

Around the last decade of the twentieth century, attitudes towards the cultural heritage among many countries started to change. *UNESCO Recommendation on the Safeguarding of Traditional Culture and Folklore of 1989* marked a new epoch for the universal concern to protect the intangible cultural heritage. The recommendation is followed by the *UNESCO Proclamation of Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity of 1997* and the *UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity of 2001* and reached its climax in the *UNESCO Convention for the*

¹ For a detailed discussion of this issue, refer to Fu Chao-Ching (2004), 'The Validity of the Venice Charter and Authenticity in Cultural Heritage Conservation – A discourse on the values differences between Eastern and Western Cultures.'

² Ibid.

Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. From a certain points of view, intangible cultural heritage may be treated as an independent category of the cultural heritage. But strictly speaking, many of them are associated with the tangible cultural heritage.

In the Western countries, the changing attitude towards cultural heritage is clearly showed in the monuments and sites nominated to inscribe on the World Heritage List. In contrast to the amounts of individual monuments and archaeological sites already inscribed on the list, more and more cases are in the categories of cultural landscapes and cultural routes. Routes of Santiago de Compostela in France (1998), Upper Middle Rhine Valley (2002) and Tokaj Wine Region Historic Cultural Landscape (2002) witnessed this shift. In fact, this change is mainly due to the revision of the *World Heritage Operation Guidelines* in 1992 to incorporate the concept of cultural landscapes and sacred sites. This is a more global 'anthropological' approach which views material remains within their wider social and cultural context i.e. the intangible elements.³ In the Western countries, this significant change happened when the development of the conservation has already reached a rather mature stage and both the government at various level and people are equipped with enough basic conservation knowledge to accept of the idea of the intangible aspects with the tangible aspects in the heritage.

In the Eastern Asian countries, many people still do not have the correct knowledge of the conservation. Although intangible cultural heritage has been discussed and included in the law, only a limited of people can properly tell the differences between tangible and intangible cultural heritages. The intangible cultural properties have been treated independently until the end of the twentieth century. Intangible values in the monuments and sites in most Eastern Asian countries was rarely an issue in their conservation.⁴

³ For detailed discussion of this issue, refer to 'Developing a New Standard-setting Instrument for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heriatge' by Janet Blake (2002), p.73.

⁴ In the East, Japan is the earliest country to include the intangible cultural heritage within the legal cultural property system. "Intangible Cultural Properties", refer to stage arts, music, craft techniques, and are included as one of the six categories in the *Cultural Property Preservation Law*. Manners and customs concerning food, clothing, and shelter, occupation, religious faith, annual events, folk performing arts, apparel, tools and implements, dwellings, and other objects used in connection with manners, customs or folk performing arts form another category

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Beginning from the end of the 1990s, both professionals started to inquire the conservation results in the past few decades. In Taiwan, the question why so many monuments have gone worse after the restorations has been raised and several reasons have been concluded. One is due to that authenticity has never been introduced as an important consideration in Taiwan's cultural heritage conservation before the 1990. The other is that the intangible values in the monuments and sites are always neglected. For example, before the idea and practice of World Heritage were introduced to Taiwan in recent years, the conservation of monuments and sites was limited to the preservation and restoration of the elements of a building without taking into consideration any activities association with the building. The result only led to many lifeless ancient-looking edifices. Some of the cultural heritage became the living-dead.

Nowadays, professionals in East Asian countries have learned many lessons from the conservation achievements of some Western examples and World Culture Heritage sites after they started to participate in international conservation affairs. When the concept of intangible cultural heritage became apparent and when the cultural exchanges between Western and Eastern Asian countries in the conservation realm. The changing attitude of intangible Values in Eastern Countries emerged especially when Japan, China and Korea joined the World Heritage Convention and Taiwan are anxious to participate in the international conservation affairs. They learned how to recognize and respect original historical evidences and understand that in search for authenticity is the most fundamental basic in the conservation. At the same time, they realize the importance of intangible values in monuments and sites.⁵

In Japan, influenced by recent changes in both social structures and the concerns of Japanese people, there is a call for improvements to the system for protecting cultural properties, such as expanding the scope of protection to

in Japanese *Cultural Property Preservation Law*. Under this category, there are tangible and intangible folk cultural properties. The Japanese model was followed by other Eastern countries in Asia, especially Taiwan's *Cultural Properties Preservation Act* of 1982.)

⁵ The change is based mainly on the "Basic Policy for the Promotion of Culture and Arts" approved by the Japanese Cabinet in December 2002 and report submitted by the Council for Cultural Affairs, the National Diet approved the "Resolution for Amendment of Law for the Protection of Cultural Properties" in May 2003.)

encompass cultural heritage that is intimately linked to Japanese daily life and consideration for categories that require special measures for conservation and use. Cultural landscape was amended to the *Japanese Cultural Properties Preservation Law* along with the concept of folk technology.⁶

Sacred Sites and Pilgrimage Routes in the Kii Mountain Range, which was inscribed in 2004 World Heritage list, is a good example showing the changing attitude in Japanese cultural properties protection. The Kii Mountain forest landscapes as well as the buildings of the Shinto shrines and Buddhist monasteries with their associated rituals form the complete contents of the cultural heritage, which well illustrates the totality of tangible and intangible parts as a whole. In fact, to achieve an integrated approach for the safeguarding of tangible and intangible cultural Heritage is an effort proposed by experts attending the conference of the same name held in Nara, Japan between October 20 and October 23, 2004. *The Yamato Declaration on Integrated Approach for the Safeguarding of Tangible and Intangible Cultural Heritage* adopted at the end of the conference concluded this effort. The Article 10 of the declaration states that "taking into account the interdependence, as well as the differences between tangible and intangible cultural heritage, and between the approaches for their safeguarding, we deem it appropriate that, wherever possible, integrated approaches be elaborated to the effect that the safeguarding of the tangible and intangible heritage of communities and groups is consistent and mutually beneficial and reinforcing."

Similar to the cases in Kii Mountain Range in Japan, many cultural properties in Eastern Asian countries are temples and monasteries of different religious sects. Amounts of valued rituals and activities are inseparable parts

⁶ The rituals began from the story of a district called Wutiegang outside of western part of Tainan's city wall. In the past, the district was an important trade port controlled by some families. Many of them hired underage workers who could only receive half of the wage because they were fewer than 16. Therefore, when workers had children of sixteen, they celebrated their sixteenth birthday because they reach the adulthood and could earn as much money as adults did. On that day, grandmothers had to prepare gifts to celebrate the sixteenth birthday of their grandsons or granddaughters. The foreman, friends and relatives were also invited to witness the rituals so that they could receive full wages since then. The guardian deity of children was also worshipped on this day to thank her protection of children during their growth until sixteenth birthday.

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of these religious monuments. In traditional societies in Eastern Asian countries, the idea of sacred was strongly presented and represented in the built environment. In order to establish a link between the human and the celestial worlds, people in the past erected temples and endowed many buildings with cosmological meaning through which they come to form the sacred part of the settlement.

People in many traditional societies in the Eastern Asian established temples as a mediating place where they could maintain a harmonious relationship between the world of the gods and the world of man. To temples and cosmological symbols, a traditional settlement owed its sacred status. Religious temples are symbolic centers of the settlement. Their role as centers is not represented by their centralized location, which they usually have, but by their character of sacredness. In traditional societies, the religion temples in the settlement were at the center of people's social, psychological and spiritual life. In addition to the buildings, rituals performed in them are part of complete religious beliefs.

Based on the above discussion, we can propose that the behavior and activities of the people of hinged almost entirely around the religious rituals and festivals held in temples. Many of them are now cultural heritage. For example, the adulthood-reaching rituals held in Tainan, Taiwan on Cisi (the seventh day of the seventh month of the lunar year) are closely related to the life of the people of the city. (6) Parades and ceremonies held on the birthday of particular deity in Taiwan's cities and towns by followers and nearby temples are also very common and deeply rooted in daily life of the people. (Figure 1 – Figure 2)

At the first glance, to include intangible aspects in religious temples, once they are designated as legal cultural heritage, shall be an easy task. However, problems exist in their preservation because special socio-cultural and religious condition in Eastern Asian countries. Especially as societies have become modernized, the idea of sacred increasingly lost their power. And, when the success of the economic developments enabled people to lead a more prosperous life materially, receive more education, and share more political power, that the secularization of societies became significant. The major concern of the people shifted from the religious to the nonreligious aspects of life. One fact ironic is that, it is at this crucial moment that many temples are listed as the national cultural property. Affected by attitudes towards non-religious aspects, the conservation of these cultural properties tends to have emphasis on the visualized parts, i.e. the material parts of the building.

Without preserving the intangible values of the temples, religious festivals, which used to be considered solemn and sacred, have become carnivalesque and many of their features have been vulgarized. For example, the deity's sedan or the gigantic statues of the deities' guardians, which used to be carried by a team of selected followers in the festival procession is moved electrically nowadays.⁷

The decline of religious commitment has also led to the disappearance of many of the religious rituals associated with the building process in Taiwan. There existed in traditional building processes various rituals, including those related to geomancy, which were performed during different stages of construction in order to ensure the health and prosperity of the buildings' occupants or users. Rituals performed ensure that the site to be built on finds favor with the gods, make sure that the building process will be a peaceful one, and guarantee the final building will be a production of prosperity and happiness. Before a building can be used, it has to be consecrated, an act that has the effect of separating it from secular world and converting it into a sacred one. In other words, building construction in the past is not only a process of production but also the process of the consecration of an edifice.

Besides, in most traditional architecture, the craftsmanship is included within as part of its total manifestation. So if a building is listed as a cultural heritage, the preservation and conservation of it should not limit to its built form only. The intangible aspects such as the rituals and the craftsmanship should be presented. Unfortunately, it did not happen all the time. For example in Taiwan, when the big construction company instead of traditional craftsmen become the main manpower for conservation projects and when efficient building production and management replace traditional ritual-oriented building process, to protect intangible cultural elements together with the tangible parts in a cultural heritage will become more and more difficult when compared with that in the West. Having realized that the intangible aspects associated with many cultural properties are either devalued or endangered, many countries in Eastern Asian countries are now ready to adopt proper strategies for safeguarding them. They also realize that if intangible cultural heritage becomes so important to a country, a proper and powerful legal basis

⁷ Another example is that the chanting of the sutra by monks and nuns inside the temple, once considered to be essential to salvation, has been replaced in many temples by so called "electrical monks and nuns", i.e., effigies with tape-recorders continuously playing sutra-chants.

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shall be provided. Without proper legislation, any argument and action towards the safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage will be in vain.⁸

Conclusion: towards the totality of tangible and intangible values in monuments and sites

On the basis of the above observations, my conclusion is that Eastern Asian professionals related to the conservation of historical buildings are tended to emphasis on the tangible values in monuments and sites in the past. As a result, the original built form of the monuments is paid much attention to at the sacrifice of the intangible values.

My argument is that people in Eastern Asian countries should keep in their mind that modern inhabitants cannot travel back to the past simply by freezing the tangible original appearance of the monuments. Nostalgically looking back without taking intangible values into consideration, as many preservationists have done, is not appropriate because the complex set of artistic, technological and socio-cultural norms, which conceived cultural heritage, have either disappeared or changed. It is important to face the fact that to preserve intangible aspects within the context of a cultural heritage is a necessity.

Theoretically speaking, a cultural heritage without any intangible aspects does not exist. Every cultural heritage, since its embodiment, has begun its growth and development process by its continuous users based on different reasons. In this sense, a cultural heritage is present and represented. Tangible and intangible values are inseparable parts of the monuments and sites. The way of conserving tangible built form and the intangible values associated with it are in a condition of an unbroken cultural totality. But this does not mean that tangible and intangible values are inert in terms of social and technological change. Changes certainly occur within every society. Ideally, the cultural context should ensure that any further change in tangible parts of a monument will be restricted within the framework provided by its intangible values.

More and more people shall realize that in intangible values there are vital, permanent guiding principles and

aspects without which a cultural heritage will never become a complete one. Today we cannot totally ignore the existence intangible values in a cultural heritage. Some lessons can be learnt from them. The schism between tangible and intangible aspects in cultural heritage should be remedied. People in the Eastern Asian countries have to re-appreciate the intangible values in cultural heritage so that not only the built form but also the living heritage such as performing arts, ritual and ceremonies can be transmitted from generation to generation.

⁸ In the Eastern Countries, Japan is a pioneer in this issue. Long before the adoption of the 2003 Convention of Intangible Heritage, In *Japanese Cultural Property Act*, the intangible cultural heritage has played an important role which even became part of the model for the 2003 Convention of Intangible Heritage.

Abstract

As an index of the culture and society, monuments and sites are essential part of every country. From cultural point of view, countries of different cultures are idiosyncratic in terms of people's sensitivity towards cultural heritage. In addition to the physical built form of the monuments and sites, intangible values are embedded in the deep layers of the monuments and sites. In the past, intangible values tended to be neglected by some people in the Eastern Asian countries. Such negligence has become one of the factors leading to the improper conservation or demolition of the cultural heritage.

However, intangible values started to be re-appreciated in recent years in Eastern Asian countries. Scholars start to advocate that the conservation of monuments and sites based on both tangible and intangible values. Conservation of monuments and sites merely for the sake of their built form is being viewed with increasing skepticism. This paper will study the raising cultural sensitivity towards intangible values in Eastern Asian countries and a comparison between Eastern Asian and Western countries will also be made.

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Fig.1 Ritual in a Taiwanese Temple



Fig.2 Adult-reaching Ritual in Tainan